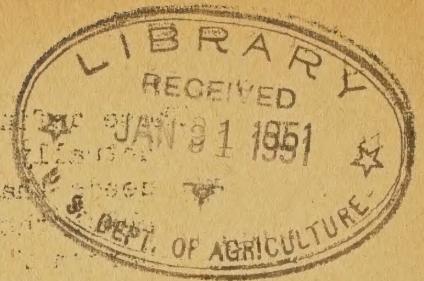


THE DISTRICT SUPERVISORS' STAKE  
IN COUNTY EXTENSION PUBLIC RELATIONS\*

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You and I are the proud heirs to a noble tradition of public service. It is our privilege and our opportunity to keep perfecting and widening this service. Good public-relations techniques will help us to do so. District supervisors have the key to improved relations in the services, training, and encouragement they can supply to county extension agents in this field.

What Kind of Public Relations Techniques?

Surely, the best possible kind. That's the kind that rural people and the Extension program deserve. Like death and taxes, we'll always have some kind of public relations with us. Our decision is whether they are to be good, medium, or poor.

If we want them to be good, we'll need a definite plan of action to keep them that way. It's work, of course. But the results in terms of Extension accomplishment and of good will more than compensate for the extra effort.

We'll want our public relations to be good, of course. So let's see what would be involved in making and keeping them good. First, a few general definitions . . .

Public Relations = What You Do -/ Your Due

That's it, what you do in giving dependable service to the public in an organized way . . . plus your due in getting the credit for your services.

Public relations means the application of the Golden Rule . . . working with and for others in the manner that you would like them to work with and for you, if they had the same opportunity.

"Extension public relations is doing good work in a way which develops in the public mind an appreciation for and recognition of the program." -- Definition by the Public Relations Subcommittee of the Committee on Extension Organization and Policy.

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These definitions will give you the general idea, although, actually public relations may be better demonstrated by deeds than defined in words. There is nothing mysterious about the term, "public relations." It's just professional jargon for something as old as human life.

Boiled down to the essence, Extension public relations are contacts . . . the right kind of contacts . . . courteously conducted, constructive contacts with people . . . public contacts made in developing the program, in giving essential services, and in explaining what you are doing. Not "publicity" in the sense of organizational puffery or propaganda, not glamorized information, but public relations grounded upon factual information and helpful services to people.

#### What's That Again

Before we go any further I suppose we might as well illustrate these general definitions by citing some specific examples. Here are a few. . .

Inviting a committee of representative county groups to help plan the Extension program. That's the public relations of democratic participation in program planning.

Presenting an illustrated verbal or written report of progress to the elected representatives who contribute to your budget (county officials, to be sure; also State and national legislative representatives who reside in your county).

Reporting to the general public by way of the press, radio, and other ways of diffusing reports to many people.

Smilingly performing a requested service when you are fagged from a late meeting last night and feel like biting nails. Remember that a person is judged by the last impression he leaves.

Writing a sincerely generous reply to an unjustly critical letter, when you would really like to tell the writer off. If the criticism is just, frankly acknowledge it and make the required adjustment.

Investing your telephone voice with warm, friendly courtesy when the jangle of the 'phone rudely interrupts you in the midst of harassed efforts to meet an important dead line.

Keeping a promise in spite of brimstone and high water.



Through contagious casual conversation, infusing influential key people with an enthusiastic regard for Extension philosophy and for the accomplishments of rural people who have adopted better Extension-recommended practices.

Making it easy for people to find you by erecting suitable directional signs, by having your office in a convenient location, and by arranging for the proper listings in the telephone book.

Training your secretary to meet people with a spirit of courteous efficiency.

These examples don't reflect all Extension public relations . . . not by a jug full. But let's get back on the main line.

#### Scope of Public Relations

Everything that Extension does has public relations implications . . . typing a neat letter as well as conducting a broad public-interest program. Public relations has no frontier. We're in it up to our necks. No organization can long succeed unless public-relations principles are applied to all its functions.

#### Why Should We Plan for Good Public Relations?

First and foremost, to carry on the teaching job efficiently. That's about 90 percent of good public relations.

Second, to inform people through public reporting how well the teaching job is being done. That's about 10 percent of good public relations. Much public recognition outside the area of direct contacts stems from this 10 percent.

#### Won't Public Recognition Come Naturally From the Doing?

It will from the cooperators with whom we have direct contacts, and from those with whom these cooperators talk. But we'll need to inform the others.

We are on the people's payroll. The public has a cash investment in us. Accordingly, it is entitled to know whether its investment is expended wisely. We therefore have an obligation to report to the public and its legislative representatives frequently throughout the year. Besides that, it's good business.

It is well to remember that good reporting also influences others to seek further information about the practices being reported. Consequently, good reporting cannot be divorced from the operating job.



### Some Qualities Needed for Good Public Relations

It takes more than people to make an organization that lives; more than an administrative program; more than a problem to be met.

It takes also a deep-seated, enthusiastic belief in the justice of our cause. Intent is as important as content.

It takes a knowledge of Extension principles, of its philosophy, its policies and objectives.

It takes an understanding of how to speak or write or do things in terms of public needs, attitudes, thinking, and interests.

It takes a carefully planned, organized, and focused public-relations effort merged with program planning, with all activities designed to carry out the program, with methods of interpreting the program to the public. Holding public confidence is an around-the-clock job.

### Interpret to Whom

To the people with whom we are already successfully working . . . those who know and profit from our services.

To the people whom we would like to bring into our immediate circle of cooperators . . . those who need our help most, but who may be backward in asking for the services to which they are entitled.

To the urban people who have a financial stake in the county extension program, but who may not benefit from it in a direct, tangible way.

To the local-opinion leaders . . . the clergy, teachers, businessmen, newspaper editors, elected representatives of government, and the like. These key people should be given special consideration. They influence many others.

### County Program Building Is Extension's Public Relations Nerve Center

The county program is the nerve center of Extension public relations . . . national and State, as well as county. What the public thinks of the agent's work is important not only to the agent, but to his or her colleagues in other counties, and to the entire Cooperative Extension Service.

The substance of the county program gives character, tone, authority, and appeal to all written or spoken words about



Extension. Public relations must proceed naturally from events and activities that are bedrocked on genuinely solid substance. People won't buy wind.

Rural people are active partners with their Government in the conduct of Extension work and should be given every opportunity to share in developing the program which, in fact, belongs to them. People like to and should participate in matters affecting their interests.

In the long run, it's just as important to popularize the county extension program as it is to build a sound program in the first place.

#### Some Key Points People Should Understand

Agents can help people to realize better the vast proportions of the Cooperative Extension Service . . . its resources, its program content, its philosophy and objectives, its professional and volunteer staff. A few points to emphasize are these:

Extension is a four-way partnership . . . people with their county, State, and national governments.

Extension is an effective compromise between two extremes . . . the extreme of national group action in the public interest on one side and the extreme of individual initiative on the other.

Extension's program content includes everything that concerns rural welfare . . . everything from atomic energy and international relations to how to drive a nail straight or sew on a button properly.

Extension is an organization that harmonizes in its program the great resources of the land, of the people who till the land, of the research developed to promote better farm and home practices among the people, of the national agricultural programs designed to aid the people, and of the tolls provided by industry. These elements are merged in an Extension educational program which leans heavily on human relations and individual freedom of expression and action.

We need local diversity in our approaches to people. But we need also to reflect in our local public contacts the Nationwide unity of Extension purpose . . . that local success depends upon vast resources of verified knowledge and upon the cooperative endeavor of the United States Department of Agriculture, the land-grant college, the county, and the people merged in the county Extension program.



Extension is financed jointly by the Federal, State, and county governments. A little less than half of the total appropriation comes from Federal sources, a little more than half from State and county sources. Three-fourths of available funds are spent in the counties.

People should know that the county agricultural agent, home demonstration agent, 4-H Club work, and the Extension specialist at the college are vital links in a larger organization with significant public-service aims jointly administered by the United States Department of Agriculture and the State land-grant college. We belong to an amazing organization of vast proportions, which is difficult for us to realize because we are so intimately a part of it.

### The How of Mass Public Relations

By this time you undoubtedly realize that public relations is more than publicity or techniques. It is philosophy, policies, the program, and attitudes, as well as the techniques of presentation. But techniques are important, too.

The public-relations tool kit should include appearances, actions, attitudes, written words, spoken words, pictures . . . every possible method of catching the minds of people or of doing things in ways agreeable to people.

Catching minds requires us to gear the content of our information to the special interests, situations, and cultural or intellectual level of persons to be reached. It isn't so much the ideas that we have to "sell" that count. It's the ideas that people "buy."

Also important are the attitudes that the county extension staff have toward people, toward each other, and toward their jobs. Personal attitudes creep unconsciously into one's public relations. How we tell or write our information is just as important as what we tell or write.

Public-relations tools are divided into two broad groups:

Direct face-to-face contacts with individuals and groups through farm and home visits, meetings, demonstrations, and other means.

Indirect mass contacts through press, radio, circular letters, organizations, and so on.

Personal and group contacts are more effective. But lack of personnel, increasing administrative responsibilities of agents, and need for wider public influence demands



more and better use of mass methods to supplement personal and group contacts . . . and also to reenforce them. Repetition in varied ways is the lifeblood of teaching.

Extension studies point to high effectiveness of mass methods in relation to cost. Surveys indicate that from 90 to 95 percent of the adult population listens to radio 15 minutes a day, or more; 85 to 90 percent reads one or more newspapers; 60 to 70 percent reads one or more magazines.

Sociologists tell us there is no such thing as uniform mass thinking over wide areas. But individuals do tend to reflect customs and habits of neighbors in the same economic or social situation. Strategical approaches should therefore be slanted to group interests.

Ideas stream across among neighbors much faster than they will seep down from above. People respond more quickly to stimulating events and the neighborly sharing of ideas; less quickly to authoritative arguments, even if they are brilliantly logical and eloquently presented. Stories about the results achieved by individuals through extension work are therefore especially effective.

Mass information should be based upon verified knowledge. People lose confidence in agencies sponsoring propaganda or puffery. Unadulterated glamor may boomerang.

Mass information should be presented briefly, concretely, and simply. The human mind can absorb only a limited amount of information at one time.

Volunteer leaders, too, are public-relations assets when they are informed, well-trained, and enthusiastic. This is true from the vantage points both of getting the teaching job done and of establishing good will. Volunteer leaders are undoubtedly also key members of their churches, their lodges, their civic, service, and other clubs. Their influences with their groups can be a powerful instrument for widening public knowledge of Extension work. They should be kept fully acquainted with local activities, interested and participating in them.

Extension has made high public-relations art of personal and group contacts. Mass methods in many counties are still laggards and need stepping up in quality and quantity.

Mass methods are not an added chore, but ways of educating and informing people. They are a vital part of a coordinated, balanced approach essential in accomplishing the complete Extension job.



### Public Relations of Trivia

Not really trivia, because some simple things have extensive influence upon people. We can turn to good account many things ordinarily regarded as commonplace.

Such things as courteous telephone manners, neatness of type-written letters, casual conversation, friendly greetings to visitors, appearance of the office.

For instance, in one year  $8\frac{1}{2}$  million persons visit county extension offices, more than  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million consult with agents on the telephone, and even more write letters to agents. Such contacts provide opportunities to give power, effectiveness, and influence to Extension work.

To regard any of the smaller, more simple things as trivia is to regard the normal likings and prejudices of human nature as trifles.

Since we can't hope to reform other people's likes and dislikes, possibly the simplest remedy is to adjust ours to theirs.

### The District Supervisor's Contribution

The district supervisor's contribution to better public relations might be undertaken in numerous ways. The following broad areas are suggestive:

- (1) Training county extension workers in the techniques of public relations to help in: (a) Doing the best possible Extension teaching job with their regular cooperators; (b) widening Extension influence beyond the sphere of the existing cooperators to reach those eligible rural people not now being reached; and (c) reporting Extension activities and results to all people in the county, including those town and city people who do not participate in the direct services of extension work.
- (2) Backgrounding agents with a clear understanding of the nature of the Cooperative Extension Service and the objectives, principles, policies, and philosophy for which it stands. This is essential so that agents can interpret these basic ideas more intelligently to their volunteer leaders, their cooperators, and the general public.
- (3) Promoting activities in the district which contribute to high morale, spirited enthusiasm, and harmonious relations within the Extension staff. Similarly, good relations should be encouraged between Extension agents and local representatives of other Government agricultural agencies.